

HESTER S. BARTON.

[To accompany Bill H. R. No. 546.]

MARCH 30, 1860.

Mr. FLORENCE, from the Committee on Invalid Pensions, made the following

REPORT.

The Committee on Invalid Pensions, to whom was referred the memorial of Mrs. H. S. Barton, widow of the late W. P. C. Barton, surgeon of the United States navy, praying Congress to grant her a widow's pension under the navy pension laws, beg leave to submit the following report :

That they have thoroughly examined the said memorial and the accompanying certificates, and they find the following to be a synopsis of the facts of the case: *Dr. Barton entered the naval service of the United States in April, 1809, and his commission as surgeon was dated June of the same year. During the war of 1812 and 1813 with England, while our navy comprised but a handful of officers, he volunteered, in a season of pressing emergency, his professional assistance in the army operations on the Delaware river, and for several months rendered valuable services there. In 1830, having returned from a cruise in the frigate Brandywine, he was ordered to Norfolk to organize and conduct a naval medical hospital. This was considered at the time a highly important enterprise, and Dr. Barton was chosen to arrange and mature the details of it, because of his acknowledged ability and untiring interest in the welfare of our navy. That institution is a monument of his industry and skill.*

Dr. W. P. C. Barton, in the year 1814, published a treatise on marine hospitals, together with a scheme for amending and systematizing the medical department of the navy.

In this work he suggests an examination of the professional qualifications of candidates for admission into the medical corps of the navy should be had prior to appointment.

Also a medical examination of recruits for the navy, and to this end urges that a medical officer of the navy should be attached to each recruiting station. It is probable that the adoption of this suggestion has been the means of saving many thousands of dollars annually in the cost of the navy. Prior to that time a large proportion of enlisted

men became invalids and claimants for pension, without ever rendering material service.

He suggested the abolition of a practice among naval surgeons of collecting fees from sailors suffering from certain loathsome affections but too common among them. This fee was denominated the *five dollar perquisite*, and was a source of considerable profit to surgeons. But Dr. Barton regarded it to be injurious to the popularity of the navy among seamen, and derogatory to the medical officers. This suggestion was adopted.

He suggested the keeping accounts of the expenditure of medical stores, and reporting quarterly, &c., the number of sick in ships.

He suggests that naval hospitals should be built at Norfolk, Philadelphia, New York, New London, Newport and Boston.

In 1843 he published (a thin quarto) a statutory history of the navy hospital fund, in which he urges that the expenses of hospitals ought to be retrenched.

While in charge of the naval hospital, Norfolk, in 1830-'31, he introduced economical reforms in its management. The following letter (page 29) is in reference to this :

NAVY DEPARTMENT, *March 15, 1831.*

I am sensible of the services rendered by Dr. Barton during his care of the naval hospital at Norfolk, both in the retrenchment of the expenditures of the institution and in improving the general arrangement of the duties of the officers of the establishment.

JOHN BRANCH,
Secretary of the Navy, as Commissioner of Navy Hospitals.

Entirely concurred in.

J. D. INGHAM,
Secretary of the Treasury, as Commissioner of Navy Hospitals.

These two volumes contain abundant evidence of Dr. Barton's zeal to ascertain and correct abuses of every description in the public service, so far at least as it concerned the medical department of the navy.

It might be fairly urged that the writings of Dr. Barton, at various periods, were of far greater value to the government, in the benefits flowing from them directly and indirectly, than fifteen or twenty years of his life passed at sea exclusively employed in prescribing for the sick and hurt.

Early in 1842, Dr. Barton was appointed chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery in the Navy Department, as established by act of Congress—again having been selected as the man best qualified to open and mature the details of such an institution. How incessantly and anxiously he labored to repay the trust reposed in him, his impaired health, after three or four years of trial, only too painfully testified to his friends and family. During his residence in Washington as chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery he suffered severely from the diseases incident to the place, and returned to Phila-

delphia with impaired health and spirits. He never regained his former health.

In 1848 he was ordered to take charge of the naval hospital at Pensacola, Florida, at a time when, at the close of the war with Mexico, that institution contained an unusual number of invalids from the squadron in the Gulf.

While actively engaged in his duties there he received a severe stroke of the sun, which still further radically affected his health.

As a naval surgeon Dr. Barton probably did more for the dignity and advancement of his corps than any other man in it; more for the perfection of the various branches of hospital aids and comfort in the navy, at home and afloat, than all the rest of his corps together; and that at a time when our naval service was much in need of such a systematizing mind as his.

As a medical teacher our country is much indebted to him. For eleven years a professor in the university of Pennsylvania, he contributed much to the high character of that institution, and left it for the purpose of giving his time and energy towards the elevation of a second school of medicine, the Jefferson, which also owes much to his labor in it. It was while a professor in this latter institution that he received an order to sea in the Brandywine, and having given his life to the service of his country, reluctantly resigned the secondary but not less important office of a teacher of his profession.

The president of the board of trustees of Jefferson college himself wrote to President Jackson in behalf of the board, begging that Dr. Barton's cruise might be a short one, expatiating on the value of his lectures to the school. The board also offered to keep the professorship open for him until his return. None of these tempting offers, however, could induce him to forego his duty, and in obedience to the government orders he relinquished a position which would have secured to him and his family, many years before his decease, an ample competency.

Dr. Barton was nearly forty-seven years a surgeon in the United States navy, and during twenty-nine years and four months was in actual service of various kinds, the peculiar character of which necessarily impaired his health, and so undermined his constitution that the disease which terminated his long and useful career found him its ready victim.

The country is indebted to his pen and labors for many standard works of science.

In many valuable branches, especially in botany and materia medica, he was the pioneer of American authors, and his works are still acknowledged as unsurpassed. His interest in the navy, which he cherished to his last moments, drew from him several valuable essays, pointing to its welfare and improvement.

Your committee, therefore, respectfully recommend that Congress direct the Commissioner of Pensions to inscribe the name of Mrs. H. S. Barton upon the roll of navy pensioners as the widow of the late Surgeon W. P. C. Barton, deceased.

